

TEMPORARY BOUNDARY

A survey on China censored videos and photographs

Video section curated by CIFA-China Independent Film Archive

PRESS RELEASE

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CHINA INDEPENDENT FILM ARCHIVE
中国独立影像档案馆

TEMPORARY BOUNDARY

GROUP SHOW : A survey on China censored videos and photographs

Video section curated by CIFA-China Independent Film Archive

Chi Peng, Gao Brothers, Liu Bolin, Mo Yi, Ren Hang, Zhang Dali, Liu Wei, Wu Junyong, Ma Yong Feng, Huang Xiang, Jin Shan, Chen Shaoxiong, Jiang Zhi, Xu Yong

07.11 - 19.12.2015

Opening 07.11 from 6 to 9 pm

Tuesday-Saturday 11am-7pm

Temporary Boundary is a curatorial project presented in two parts, revealing a selection of contemporary Chinese photographs and artist's videos that have been censored in their own country.

Galerie Paris-Beijing is very proud to host the curator of CIFA-China Independent Film Archive for the video part of the exhibition.

Among the photographic works, the selection of which was conceived by Romain Degoul, the gallery's founder, we find works by the **Gao Brothers**: since the 1980s, the two brothers have been practicing political satire through their pieces, which has brought them under close surveillance. Two guards are regularly posted at the entrance of their studio.

The photograph *Now-ing*, by **Chi Peng** was censored right in the middle of the SH Contemporary fair in Shanghai, where the gallerist initially had to cover the work with a sheet before removing it... only to sell it to the censor's friend, who was amused by the whole polemic! Such are the anecdotes that we recount through the exhibition.



Gao Brothers, *The interview*, 2007



Chi Peng, *Now-ing*, censored during the SH Contemporary in 2012

With *Memories of 1989*, **Mo Yi** – a direct witness to the events in Tiananmen Square – has his own way of documenting an event that is taboo in China. For all these years, his photographs have remained hidden in a safe place. With his other series of self-portraits, *Prisoner* (1997), Mo Yi photographs himself from all sides, like a mug shot. Newspaper clippings tell of Tiananmen. These iconic images are typical examples of self-censorship.

Here, sets chosen by **Liu Bolin** to create his photo-performances are strongly marked by political symbolism, such as propaganda slogans or the national flag, the use of which is absolutely forbidden in China.



Mo Yi, *Prisoner*, 1997



Liu Bolin, *Hide in the City n°43*, 2007

On June Fourth 1989, **Xu Yong** documented with his film camera the Tiananmen square protests in Beijing. The photograph had kept hidden this trove of snapshots for a long time. After more than two decades, he digitally scanned his negatives and today he presents them directly as negative images. The purpose is to revisit this important historic event and to reflect on its continued impact.

As he expressed himself: «On the attempt to cover-up and induce amnesia on an historic event, negatives have more direct impact as evidence than normal photographs or digital media».

Xu Yong borrows the negative image photographic plates to remind us that the Tiananmen massacre is still forbidden from public discourse by the Chinese government, and the commemoration of this unbearable reality is even further proscribed. But even more than that, they raise questions about people's collective memories of the events of June 4th, 1989. In the works, the real description of history seems constrained by the dark imagery of the negatives, yet it achieves unfamiliar sensations as the eyes of the spectator are continuously seeking.

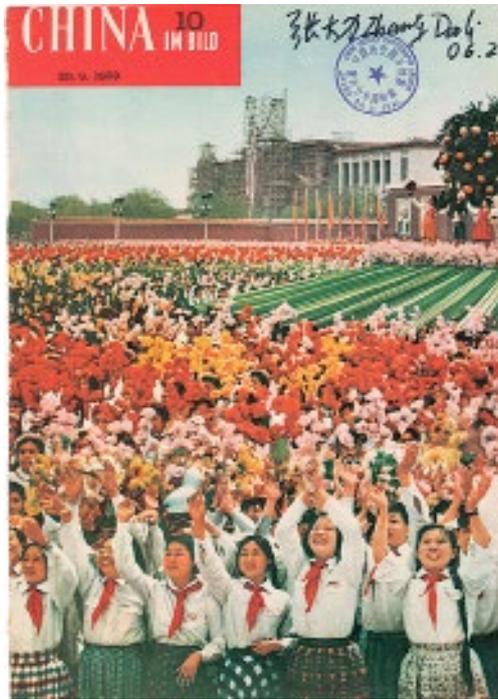


Xu Yong, *NEGATIVES*, 1989



Xu Yong, *NEGATIVES*, 1989

Second History, an investigation of Maoist propaganda photographs undertaken by **Zhang Dali** over a period of years, confronts original photographs with newspapers and documents from the period, all in one composition. The manipulations done at the time to elevate the image of The Great Helmsman are an amusing nod to Photoshop!



Zhang Dali, *Second History*, n° 109, 2005

The theme of sexuality is recurrent in the work of **Ren Hang** (1987): naked bodies interlaced, women smoking alone on a city rooftop or naked in a tree, but also scenes of kisses and embraces, always infused with a great poetry. They are reminiscent of Nan Goldin, but less subversive, as Ren Hang doesn't wish to be explicit, nor to openly show his sexuality – his photographs are above all about opening up a space of freedom. People have spat on his works, and he has had to cancel exhibitions in the past due to censorship. In his work, we can read the deep malaise of Chinese youth, but also, ultimately, their pleasure at being together, and the strength of the ties that bind them and the mutual confidence that they have for each other. Even today, the naked bodies and the sexual scenes in the work of this young Beijing artist challenge Chinese morals.



Ren Hang, 2012_5



Ren Hang, 2014_19

The animations of **Wu Junyong** have the same destabilizing effect as Aesop's fables and Grimm's fairy tales: peopled by kings, buffoons and animals, the videos use the codes of a marionette puppet master, and of performance, to critique society's cupidity and pride. Almost gothic in their aesthetic, they are marked by a sombre spirit that seems timeless, drawing from Chinese and Western mythology to expose the folly of authority. In Wu's work, where drawing allows for a great freedom, a strange feeling of ambiguity pervades as a result of the fact that such violent images can seem so attractive to us.

In *A Day to Remember*, **Liu Wei** questions students as they leave Beijing University on 4 June 2005, the day of the 16th anniversary of the repression of Tiananmen. He asks them all the same question: "Do you know what today's date is?" Even if someone dares to respond correctly, the majority of the passers-by turn their heads away, while others remain silent when faced with the camera, or say that they have no idea: "I don't know", "I don't want to answer", or "turn off the camera" are the most common responses. Liu Wei films the reactions of passers-by to what seems to be a very simple question, and in so doing, he convincingly demonstrates that the revolt is still a taboo subject in China. The blood that flowed at that time has been replaced by silence. Many young people are not aware that for years, it was forbidden to discuss the subject, and that the revolt was covered up by the authorities. This is his way of breaking the silence and showing the denial.



Wu Junyong, *Opera*, video animation, 2007



Liu Wei, *A day to remember*, vidéo still, 2005

An artist with a strong sense of social engagement, **Ma Yong Feng** created Forget Art in 2009, a social mobilization organization that operates according to a series of alternative micro-resistance tactics through different forms of artistic expression and the use of social networks. Through his work, *The Swirl*, the artist bears witness to the difficulty of practicing his art in a post-totalitarian society, where control is exercised as totally as it is invisibly. This fifteen-minute video is astonishing as much for its optical composition as for its duration. The gaze is immediately directed towards the open drum of a washing machine. Six goldfish are tormented and abused inside. The futility of the torment and the powerlessness of the situation can be read as a metaphor of torture. It can equally be perceived as a social critique and a cynical observation of the artist's existence.



Ma Yong Feng, *The swirl*, video, 2002

In 2011, **Huang Xiang** was placed in criminal detention for a month following his performance of *Jasmine Flower*. After he was released, his pursuit of artistic productions and exhibitions in China was restricted. Today, Huang Xiang is mainly involved in independent cinema. He produced and directed his first films, *Roast Chicken* and *Yumen*. The latter recently received the grand prize at the Taiwan International Documentary Festival. His performance *Demolition* reveals yet again the artist's will to express himself in the face of the powers that be. The performance was filmed in the evening: a man undresses and holds himself upright on a stone floor. Huang changes into a nurse's uniform. Equipped with various surgical utensils, he engraves the word "*Demolition*" in Chinese on the torso of the man. A photo of the final result is taken and revealed the same night in a shop window. Immediately, the authorities arrive and try to confiscate the print.



Huang Xiang, *Demolition*, video performance, 2011

Chen Shaoxiong was a founding member of the “Big Tail Elephant”, a group of conceptual artists active in Guangzhou in the 1990s. Today, he works both individually and in collaboration as a member of an Asian artists’ collective called “Xijing Men”, as well as in another Chinese artists’ collective, “Project without space”. His art spans different media, including painting, photography, collage and conceptual art. For Ink History Chen created more than 150 pen and ink drawings of historical photos of major events in China from 1909 to 2009. Following this, he filmed the drawings in a three-minute video that retraces the story of Modern China, with a ticking clock in the background.

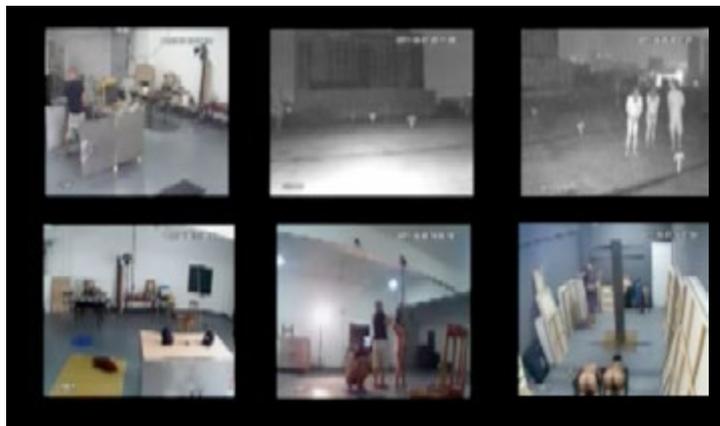
For his surveillance videos, **Jin Shan** recruited two volunteers to be directed in a film that borders on the sadistic: a meditation on the ways that we relinquish certain freedoms. The artist creates absurd and unexpected scenarios that reveal man’s desire to be controlled. Through them, he subtly explores the definition of liberty: the impact of his images’ violence – at once visual and psychological – suggests a profound feeling of awkwardness and discomfort that embody the multiple facets of the notion of liberty.



Chen Shaoxiong, *Ink History*, video, 2008-2010



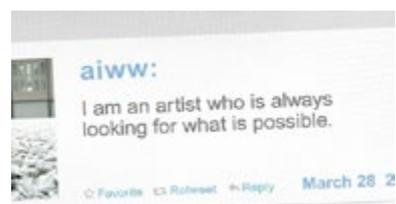
Jiang Zhi, *Onward! Onward! Onward!*, vidéo still, 2006



Jin Shan, *Why Freedom?*, vidéos, 2014

Jiang Zhi is one of China’s most important video artists. The winner of the Chinese Contemporary Art Association’s Chinese Contemporary Art Award in 2000, he comments on various aspects of the turbulent society of modern China, from the move away from individual existence to the frantic rhythm of our social lives. The video installation *Onward! Onward! Onward!* (2006) represents the Chinese leaders Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin running, one after the other. Their endless motion represents faith in progress, as summed up by the popular slogan: “As long as we keep running, we will always be advancing”, while highlighting that the notion of destiny is profoundly rooted in this society.

Last but not least, the exhibition shows the documentary *AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY* by Alison Klayman. This young American director has filmed the daily struggle and related the inside story of the most emblematic figure of the dissidence in China. **Ai Weiwei** is known the world over for his critical position and his activism that in our digital age inspire global audiences and blur the boundaries of art and politics. For her first film, Alison Klayman gained unprecedented access to Ai Weiwei while working as a journalist in China. Her detailed portrait provides a nuanced exploration of contemporary China and one of its most compelling public figures.



AI WEIWEI : NEVER SORRY

A film directed by Alison Klayman

91'00"

2012

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